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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies four characteristics which are essential to the nature of an "inviting school." Inviting schools are interpreted to convey respect for all members of staff and students. The four basic characteristics of such a school are school climate, educational program, organizational structure, and faculty. Essentially, the climate must be trusting, open, and threat-free so that each person may become honest, authentic, and risk-taking. The educational program should (1) provide each student with a maximum number of opportunities for success, (2) establish a minimum educational foundation for all students, (3) offer unique learning experiences for students based on individual abilities, needs, interests, and goals, (4) allow students to move through the program at their own rate, and (5) be based on belief in and respect for the worth of each human being. The organizational structure must allow for student, parent, and teacher involvement in the decision making process. It should be structured to allow opportunities for small groups and one-to-one student/teacher interaction, and for regular parent-teacher conferences. The organization should provide for early high school graduation and should afford opportunities for students to be assigned appropriate tasks regardless of age. The faculty should consist of individuals who perceive themselves and their students as valuable, able, and responsible. They should be willing to take risks and experiment, analytical about their own teaching behaviors, and open to new knowledge and experience. (Author/KC)

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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INVITING SCHOOL

(A paper presented at the 1978 Annual Meeting of the American
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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INVITING SCHOOL

Since 1974, I have been responsible for working with faculty, students, and parents in the development of an inviting school. The concept of invitational education was developed by William Watson Purkey, Professor, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and is described in his recent book, Inviting School Success: A Self-Concept Approach to Teaching and Learning (Purkey, 1978).

Purkey (1978) defines an invitation as "a summary description of messages--verbal and nonverbal, formal and informal--continuously transmitted to students with the intention of informing them that they are responsible, able, and valuable. Conversely, a disinvasion is intended to tell them that they are irresponsible, incapable, and worthless. The word invitation has a special value: It indicates both respect for the one invited and responsibility on the part of the inviter. Invitational teaching is a 'doing with', rather than a 'doing to' process" (p.3). As explained by Purkey: "Each invitation, no matter how small or in what area, can potentially make a significant contribution to the student's sense of self-esteem--particularly if the invitation is accepted and successfully acted upon by the student" (p.6).

While invitational teachers contribute the most toward making a school inviting, other variables may determine the extent to which a school is inviting. The quality of life in a school is affected by the administrative and procedural policies, the educational programs, and organizational structures of that school. The quality of life in schools has been analyzed by Lewis and Purkey by comparing two contrasting school models--the factory school and the family school. They maintain that the family school, characterized by warmth, a cooperative spirit, and positive expectations will improve the quality of life in schools (Purkey, 1978, p. 83).

As I have attempted to provide leadership in the development of a school that is consistent with Purkey's concept of invitational education, four major characteristics have emerged as central: 1) The inviting school has a psychological climate which is open, trusting, and threat free; 2) The formal educational program of the inviting school is designed to really meet the needs of each student; 3) The inviting school involves students, teachers, parents, and administrators in the decision making process; and 4) The inviting school faculty is intentionally inviting the majority of the time.

This paper is devoted to an elaboration of the above four characteristics and to a description of some strategies we used in trying to operationalize these four characteristics. It is important to note that strategies seen as appropriate for operationalizing these characteristics may vary from school to school, given the uniquenesses of each school. What is described below is descriptive of the efforts of one faculty, student body, parent representatives, and administrators in the attempted development of an invitational school in one midwestern community.

School Climate

The inviting school has a psychological climate which is open, trusting, and threat free. The more open, trusting, and threat free a school climate is the larger the number of persons in the human group who will feel able, valuable, and responsible. If each member of the human group in a school can feel accepted by others for what he/she is, valued by others, and made to believe that his/her ideas, thoughts, and feelings may be expressed freely and openly; then each individual can become an honest, risk-taking, authentic person who can feel okay about being human, or less than perfect. When group members can feel this way about themselves, they can then feel the same way about others, and therefore, become more accepting of others and see them as able, valuable, and responsible. At the same time, students, teachers, and administrators can develop a high level of trust, a sense of belonging, and a feeling that they are somebody. When the majority of the members of a human group perceive themselves as somebody and thereby perceive others in the same way, the climate will become non-threatening.

In our attempts to establish a school climate characterized by openness, trust, and an absence of threat, adult modeling has been a useful tool. Many of the adults in the school setting possessed high self-concepts as teacher or administrator. They already behaved in ways that were open, non-threatening, trusting, and accepting with students and each other. When some teachers and administrators demonstrated that they trusted themselves and others and that they could freely express their honest feelings to others, students and other teachers began practicing similar behaviors. Through observation, we could see the psychological climate of our school becoming more open, trusting, and threat free.

Another tool we have found to be useful in building an "invitational" school climate is establishing two-way communication. We have found that it is

important not to have the right answers. Rather than offer an appropriate course of action for solving a problem, we believe it is helpful to get faculty members, who are affected, involved in finding a workable solution. We have found that it is important to listen more than talk, and to be nonjudgmental of what we see and hear. Faculty have taught me that it is important for me, as the school's head administrator, to be in the hallways, classrooms, and faculty lounges as often as possible for informal interaction.

Other strategies we have used which seem to have contributed to creating an open, trusting, threat free climate are the avoidance of IQ, achievement test scores, and grade point averages in considering students for admission to the school. Further, we do not administer group IQ tests to our students. We attempt to minimize academic competition by evaluating individual student growth rather than comparing him/her with others and by not giving letter or numerical grades to students in grades K-8. Regularly scheduled parent/teacher conferences are used instead. We still give letter grades in grades 9-12, but they are based on the number of course competencies attained (criteria referenced) by the individual student, rather than the Bell Curve, the color of the student's eyes, or how much or little a teacher likes a student. Our faculty members work diligently not to label any student either in or out of class. Even our special education students are not labeled or segregated. These students spend the majority of their time in regular classrooms. They work with the special education resource teachers on a one-to-one basis, and the resource teachers work with each child's classroom teacher to provide him/her with additional ways of helping the student within the classroom environment.

Educational Program

The formal educational program of the inviting school is designed to really meet the needs of each student. The philosophical statement of most schools indicates a commitment to meeting the needs of each student; a belief in, and respect for the worth, uniqueness, and dignity of each student; and a belief that one's ability to make rational decisions is necessary for maintaining a free society.

However, frequently such philosophical statements seem to be forgotten at the operational level. Fragmented educational programs may result which could ignore individual differences of students and perhaps greatly hinder the probability

of students becoming able, valued, and responsible. Few, if any, educators believe that all students learn the same thing, the same way, in the same amount of time. Yet few programs reflect this belief. Few, if any, educators are committed to an unfree society, irrational thinking, or irresponsible behaviors. Yet, how many educational programs provide students with opportunities to learn rational thinking, assume responsibility, and to live and work in a free society?

A school not providing an educational program that is consistent with its philosophical commitments, beliefs, and goals cannot really meet the needs of each student. An invitational school only can exist when each student's academic, psychological, and emotional needs are being met.

In the development of an educational program which would operationally make it possible to meet the needs of each of our students, a number of program characteristics were identified. These program characteristics include that the program: 1) provide each student with a maximum number of opportunities for academic success; 2) provide a minimum educational foundation common to all students which would take into account the academic, psychological, physical, and emotional exceptionalities of each student; 3) provide unique learning experiences for individual students based upon his/her abilities, needs, interests, educational goals, and/or career objectives; 4) provide opportunities for a student to move through the program at his/her own rate, allowing for early graduation; and 5) is based upon a belief in and respect for the worth, uniqueness, and dignity of each person involved.

The educational program which evolved consists of three curricula: the Common, Challenge, and Compensatory. The Common Curriculum provides all students with a minimum educational foundation. The Common Curriculum is a competency-based program containing approximately 500 minimum competencies that all students seek to attain prior to graduation. The minimum competencies are organized under six roles of man: Learner, Producer, Consumer, Citizen, Social Being, and Aesthetic Being.

The Challenge Curriculum provides a formal mechanism for meeting the uniqueness of each student based upon his/her abilities, needs, interests, educational goals, and/or career objectives. Three options are available to students in the Challenge Curriculum: 1) taking Challenge Curriculum courses in the school itself; 2) taking university courses for high school and/or university credit; and 3) negotiating an individualized learning experience with a faculty advisor. Currently, 40% of our students are involved in Challenge Curriculum learning experiences. In addition to taking university courses and advanced courses in

the high school area, students are involved in research studies, community internships, and apprenticeships in law firms, animal clinics, nursing homes, commercial art firms, floral shops, businesses, and governmental agencies. Based upon our belief that age should not limit a student's learning opportunities, an eleven year old has taken a university level German course (he received an A), and a ten year old interested in veterinary medicine completed a four-week internship in a small animal hospital.

The Compensatory Curriculum individualizes and humanizes the Competency-based program (Common Curriculum) by taking into account the individual differences of students who are educationally, physically, socially, psychologically, and/or mentally exceptional. For example, one of our elementary students, born with an open spine and paralyzed from the waist down, is confined to a wheelchair. He is a brilliant young man, but any minimum competency requiring that he walk or run would be impossible, inappropriate and inhumane. Therefore appropriate competencies are substituted for his physical exceptionality.

The three curricula are not mutually exclusive. Competency attainment is not a prerequisite to the Challenge Curriculum. In fact, many students have attained Common Curriculum competencies through Challenge Curriculum learning experiences.

Organizational Structure

The inviting school involves students, teachers, parents, and administrators in the decision-making process. A school which is committed to and organized for the involvement of everyone affected by a decision in the decision-making process provides maximum opportunities for its family members to feel able, valued, and responsible. When involved, students, teachers, parents, and administrators share ownership in family problems, in finding solutions, and the resultant successes and failures. Those sharing ownership will at the same time share responsibility. The more persons who are involved in the decision-making process, the larger the number of persons who are relating, asserting, investing, and coping (Purkey, Cage, and Graves, 1973). The larger the number of persons with positive self-concepts, the higher the probability for having an open, trusting, and threat free climate, and consequently an inviting school.

Specific strategies we used to operationalize involvement of students, teachers, and parents in the decision-making process are: 1) involving students,

teachers, and parents in program development; 2) utilizing the input of students, teachers, and parents in the day to day operation of the school; 3) establishing procedures through which students, teachers, and parents could monitor student behavior; 4) providing time for students and teachers to interact on a one-to-one basis and in small groups outside assigned classtime; 5) giving teachers more responsibility than administrators for decisions concerning time and location assignments of students; 6) assigning students to appropriate learning environments and tasks regardless of age; and 7) assigning students to appropriate learning environments outside the school.

The involvement of all persons affected by decisions in the decision-making process has been a major underlying principle of our endeavors to develop an inviting school. Consequently, the purposes and objectives of the school, the new educational program, and all of the school's policies and procedures have evolved out of the involvement process. At the onset of developing our new educational program, students, graduates of the school, parents, faculty members, and community leaders were involved in determining where the school was and where it should be in order to better meet the needs of the students. Given the results of a needs assessment, and a basic commitment to serve all students according to his/her needs, the faculty advisory committee (which is elected by the total faculty), and the principal developed the framework for the program. The entire faculty was then organized into six teams under the six roles mentioned above: Learner, Consumer, Producer, Citizen, Social Being, and Aesthetic Being. The six faculty teams, student and parent advisory committees, administrators, university faculty, and community leaders identified and developed the minimum competencies for inclusion in the Common Curriculum. Three of the high school interdisciplinary teams and high school students developed three Challenge Curriculum courses. By being involved, everyone developed a commitment to the new program and hence has shared responsibility for its strengths and weaknesses.

Students, teachers, and faculty have provided input into the day-to-day operation of the school through four principal's advisory committees. A middle school, high school, parent, and faculty principal's advisory committee meets regularly with the principal to provide advice, raise concerns, identify and solve problems. These advisory committees, three student councils, numerous faculty committees, and an active parent-student-teacher association have contributed to open communication among and between all groups.

Students, teachers, and parents have become involved in monitoring student behavior through an appointed Board of Review which consists of four high school

students, two parents, and two faculty members. The purpose of the Board is to hear discipline and attendance problem cases, and recommend a course of action to the principal. The Board of Review provides students with an additional step in due process and a "place to be heard". The existence of the Board of Review significantly has contributed to minimizing behavior problems and maximizing daily attendance in our school.

Time for students and teachers to interact formally and informally on a one-to-one basis and in small groups has become possible through Advisor-Advisee group meetings, limited faculty teaching assignments, and an open-campus policy for high school students. Middle and high school Advisor-Advisee groups, consisting of twelve students and one faculty member, meet together once a week for forty minutes. The purpose of the group meetings is to provide each student with personalized educational guidance in a small group setting where he/she can develop a sense of identity, belonging, and educational and personal security.

Middle and high school faculty members teach classes 240 minutes a day, for a total of three 80 minute periods. This scheduling allows them with time to work with other faculty and to advise, council, and/or assist students. While elementary teachers have students assigned to them for longer periods of time each day, their self-contained classrooms, individualized programs, and use of resource teachers allow sufficient time for one-to-one interaction with students.

To provide high school students with time to work with individual faculty members and others off-campus, an open-campus policy has been initiated. When not in class, high school students are free to move about as they please. Many individualized Challenge Curriculum learning experiences have been planned, implemented, and evaluated during available non-class time.

The provision of time for student-teacher interaction has significantly improved communications, warmth, cooperative spirit, and positive expectations (Coopersmith, 1967), and therefore the quality of life in the school. It also has indicated to students and faculty members that they are able, valued, and responsible.

To provide faculty members with a more complete opportunity for managing the learning environments of their students, teachers have assumed primary responsibility for assignment of students in our school. Currently, elementary teachers meet as a group during spring quarter to discuss and make recommendations as to which classroom each of their students should be assigned during the following year. The middle school faculty team collectively determines where

each student is assigned. Currently, high school teachers are involved in the assignment of students through advisement, making recommendations to the counselor for placement, and transfers.

Elementary, middle, and high school teachers are totally responsible for determining the most appropriate location for students with whom they work on individualized Challenge Curriculum activities. We are moving toward full faculty responsibility for the learning opportunities of the students who will be assigned to each faculty team. Rather than assigning students to courses, they will be assigned to a faculty team. Responsibility for scheduling internal to the team will become the responsibility of that team. The intent is to provide more flexibility for meeting the educational needs of students, whether the appropriate environment is within or outside of the school.

Faculty

The inviting school faculty is intentionally inviting the majority of the time. Purkey (1978) identifies four levels of inviting and uninviting teaching; level 1: intentionally disinviting; level 2: unintentionally disinviting; level 3: unintentionally inviting; and level 4: intentionally inviting. He describes the intentionally inviting teacher as one who intentionally sends explicit, appropriate invitations to students that they are able, valuable, and responsible (pp. 19-20). "Being explicit about the invitations we send to students helps us check the accuracy of our perceptions and avoid the problems of misunderstanding that appear in many schools" (p.20). When the majority of the faculty can identify what they are doing and thereby know what they are doing when sending invitations, the larger the number of students and the more frequently each student will feel able, valued, and responsible.

Intentionally inviting teachers have certain characteristics, skills, and behaviors which distinguish them from uninviting teachers. Intentionally inviting teachers have higher, positive self-concepts as teacher. They perceive themselves as more able, valuable, and responsible. They feel a greater sense of agency or control over themselves, their destinies, and their environments. They are more open with others, to new knowledge and experience, and are less threatened by change and experimentation. They are more trusting of themselves and others and tend to accept others' points-of-view more readily. They are more analytical and critical of their teaching ability. Intentionally inviting teachers treat students with respect at all times and seem to listen to them more

carefully than uninviting teachers. They are more authentic or honest with themselves, their students, parents, and other educators. They hold more gentle but firm expectations for their students and spend more time working with students to reach those expectations. They see themselves more as helpers than adversaries and are more concerned about the "total child". They spend more time and energy dealing with the academic and personal problems of students. Also, intentionally inviting teachers are more accurate about their own perceived strengths and weaknesses than their counterpart.

When we began our efforts toward building an inviting school, the majority of the faculty already were inviting teachers and a few were intentionally inviting. In order to assist each of us in becoming intentionally inviting, the faculty members and administrators have been involved in personnel development. During the last four years, we have spent a minimum of one hour a week, after school hours, working together in such areas as: self-concept theory, strategies for enhancing students' self-concepts, communication and human relations skills, program development, personalizing instruction, team teaching, utilizing community resources, and teaching as a helping profession. The process of working together toward common goals in an open, trusting, threat free climate has helped uninviting teachers become more inviting and inviting teachers become more intentionally inviting.

Summary and Implications

What I have attempted to do in this paper is discuss four characteristics that have become central in my efforts to build a school that could be characterized as more inviting; 1) A school which has a psychological climate characterized by openness, trust, and an absence of threat; 2) A school in which the individual needs of students are met; 3) A school where students, teachers, parents, and administrators share jointly in the process and responsibility of decision making; and 4) A school where faculty are intentionally inviting the majority of the time.

As I reflect over my four years of experience in attempting to build a school that is more invitational, the two characteristics that seem to be paramount are that faculty intentionally send more invitational messages to students, and that the psychological climate of a school is characterized by openness, trust, and an absence of threat. Perhaps it is a "chicken-and-egg" question as to which is more important. Is the creation of such a psychological climate

possible because faculty send intentionally inviting messages most of the time? Or, do faculty become more intentionally inviting because the psychological climate of the school is conducive to the development of intentionally inviting behaviors?

The question may seem irrelevant, since one could argue that it makes little difference which comes first as long as both characteristics are present. The point, though, is how does one begin? Is it possible to focus directly upon teacher behavior, in trying to increase the percentage of intentionally inviting messages? Or must this be done indirectly, through focusing upon variables that comprise the psychological climate of a school?

Perhaps one's philosophical stance will suggest a direction to the above quandry. I think agreement can be reached that a school which has an increase of intentionally inviting messages can significantly improve the quality of life in a school and therefore the academic and personal success of youngsters.

Purkey (1978) has provided the concept of invitational education. It now is up to those of us who are practitioners to bring it to life. I hope sharing some of the strategies described in this paper from our attempt to build a school that could be characterized as invitational will provide a start for the challenging steps ahead.

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